

Council 4, AFSCME AFL-CIO
Testimony Concerning
H.B. 6693
An Act Concerning the Creation of a State Health Care Plan
February 26, 2007
AFSCME Council 4, 444 East Main Street, New Britain, CT

Senator Handly, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address the issue of affordable healthcare. I am Peter Thor, Director of Policy and Planning for Council 4 AFSCME. Council 4 AFSCME supports the intent of H.B. 6693 to provide universal coverage for all Connecticut citizens. The time to provide universal and affordable healthcare is long overdue. It is absolutely essential that we act now to provide universal coverage to preserve the high quality of life in Connecticut and to protect Connecticut's economy.

Council 4 represents almost 500 separate local unions in 147 of Connecticut's municipalities. The single most contentious issue at the bargaining table is healthcare, or more precisely, health insurance. Employers are feeling overwhelmed by "sticker shock," as they receive notice upon notice of premium increases well above the inflation rate. Employees feel they are one serious illness away from losing everything. Most of the 35,000 members we represent are covered by employer-provided health insurance, but a small number who are not full-time, have no insurance. Moreover, an increasing number of our members report that their young adult children, both with and without college education, have no medical insurance. This is not because they don't want coverage: it is simply not available.

A month ago I learned of a situation where an employee with failing health and eligible for early retirement would not retire. Her medical insurance would continue for a few years with the cost borne by the employer, but she could not retire because it would leave her husband, who had heart trouble, with no access to healthcare. This is by no means an isolated incident. It simply happens to be the most recent. Of course, reality drives these situations. Sooner rather than later, worsening health will force the employee to retire early. Then, her husband's only access to healthcare will be the emergency room: the most expensive healthcare option. All of us subsidize that option in increased healthcare insurance premiums. We must stop this upward spiral of healthcare costs created by the downward spiral of early access to medical care. A broad-based universal and affordable healthcare system is the only way to accomplish this goal.

The Statement of Purpose in H.B. 6693 is eloquent in its simplicity: "To create a state health care plan to provide quality, affordable healthcare coverage to all Connecticut residents. For the health and wellbeing of Connecticut's residents and its economy, it must be done."